

PSSA Test Taking Tips

Prepare:

- Analyze how you did on a similar test in the past
- Review your previous tests, and sample tests, especially when studying for the final exam.
- Each test prepares you for the next: the more tests you take, the better you will develop your test taking strategies.

Arrive early for tests - Before a test, list everything you will need for it that is allowed (pencils/pens, calculator, dictionary, watch, etc.) . Good preparation helps you focus on the task at hand

Be comfortable but alert - Choose a good spot in the room and make sure you have enough space to work, maintain comfortable posture in your seat, but don't "slouch".

Stay relaxed and confident - Keep a good attitude. Remind yourself that you are well-prepared and are going to do well. If you find yourself anxious, take several slow, deep breaths to relax. Don't talk about the test to other students just before entering the room: their anxiety can be contagious.

Test Taking:

- Read the directions carefully. This may be obvious, but it will help you avoid careless errors
- If there is time, quickly look through the test for an overview. Note key terms, jot down brief notes. If you can, mark the test or answer sheet with comments that come to mind.
Ask if that is permitted!

Answer questions in a strategic order:

- Answer easy questions first to build confidence, score points, and mentally orient yourself to vocabulary, concepts, and your studies. It may also help you make associations with more difficult questions.
- Then difficult questions or those with the most point value.
- With objective tests, first eliminate those answers you know to be wrong, or are likely to be wrong, don't seem to fit, or where two options are so similar as to be both incorrect.
- With essay questions, broadly outline your answer and sequence the order of your points.

Review:

- Resist the urge to leave as soon as you have completed all the items. Review your test to make sure that you have answered all questions, did not mis-mark answers. did not make simple mistakes.
- Proofread spelling, grammar, punctuation, decimal points, etc.
- Change answers to questions if you made a mistake, or misread the question or if you find information elsewhere in the test that indicates that your first choice is incorrect.
- Decide on and adopt study strategies that work best for you. Review your test preparation and identify those habits that worked well and replace those that don't!

True/false Exams or questions

Every part of a true sentence must be "true"

If any one part of the sentence is false, the whole sentence is false despite many other true statements.

Pay close attention to

negatives, qualifiers, absolutes, and long strings of statements

Negatives can be confusing.

If the question contains negatives, such as "no, not, cannot" drop the negative and read what remains.

Decide whether that sentence is true or false. If it is true, its opposite, or negative, is usually false.

Qualifiers are words that restrict or open up general statements.

Words like "sometimes, often, frequently, ordinarily, generally" open up the possibilities of making accurate statements. They make more modest claims, are more likely to reflect reality, and usually indicate "true" answers.

Absolute words restrict possibilities.

"No, never, none, always, every, entirely, only" imply the statement must be true 100% of the time and usually indicate "false" answers.

Long sentences often include groups of words set off by punctuation.

Pay attention to the "truth" of each of these phrases. If one is false, it usually indicates a "false" answer

Guessing: There is no guessing penalty on the PSSA, so make an educated guess if you are unsure. You have a 50% chance of getting the right answer.

Multiple Choice Exams or questions

Multiple choice questions usually include a phrase or stem followed by three to five options:

Test strategies:

- Read the directions carefully
- Know if each question has one or more correct option
- Know if you are penalized for guessing – on the PSSA there is no penalty for guessing!
- Know how much time is allowed (this governs your strategy)

Preview the test

- Read through the test quickly and answer the easiest questions first.
- Mark those you think you know in some way that is appropriate.
- Read through the test a second time and answer more difficult questions.
- You may pick up cues for answers from the first reading, or become more comfortable in the testing situation.
- If time allows, review both questions and answers. It is possible you mis-read questions the first time.

- **There is no guessing penalty on the PSSA, so take an educated guess if you are unsure. You have a 50% chance of getting the right answer.**

Answering options

- Cover the options, read the stem, and try to answer. Select the option that most closely matches your answer
- Read the stem with each option. Treat each option as a true-false question, and choose the "most true"
- Eliminate options you know to be incorrect. If allowed, mark words or alternatives in questions that eliminate the option.
- Give each option of a question the "true-false test:" This may reduce your selection to the best answer.
- Closely evaluate question options that grammatically don't fit with the stem.
- Closely evaluate question options that are totally unfamiliar to you.
- Closely evaluate question options that contain negative or absolute words.
Try substituting a qualified term for the absolute one, like *frequently* for *always*; or *typical* for *every* to see if you can eliminate it.
- "All of the above:" If you know two of three options seem correct, "all of the above" is a strong possibility. If you are certain one of the statements is true don't choose "None of the above" or one of the statements are false don't choose "All of the above".

Number answers:

- Toss out the high and low and consider the middle range numbers
- "Look alike options" probably one is correct; choose the best but eliminate choices that mean basically the same thing, and thus cancel each other out
- Double negatives: Create the equivalent positive statement and consider
- Echo options: If two options are opposite each other, chances are one of them is correct
- Favor options that contain qualifiers
- The result is longer, more inclusive items that better fill the role of the answer
- If two alternatives seem correct, compare them for differences, then refer to the stem to find your best answer.

Short Answer/Open-Ended Exams or questions

The primary purpose in giving a short-answer test is to test whether you have a foundation of knowing the material.

When taking the test

- Follow ALL instructions, especially if the prompt is a multi-step process.
- Respond directly to the question or directive.
- Focus on keywords and ideas called for. Eliminate those that do not directly address the information requested in the test item.
- Respond and write concise answers. Connect key facts into short sentences according to the test instructions.
- If the prompt is asking for facts, don't give a personal opinion.

- Write as neatly as possible.
- Don't write long introductions or conclusions. The bulk of your time should be spent on answering the question.
- Focus on one main idea per paragraph.
- Proof read your work and correct any errors.

When taking the math test

- Follow ALL instructions, especially if the prompt is a multi-step process.
- Respond directly to the question or directive.
- Write as neatly as possible.
- Identify what you know, what you need to know, and what formula is required.
- Use the formula sheet.
- Show all your work in a step by step fashion.
- Box your final answer.
- Explain how you formulated the answer in sentences.
- Proof read your work and correct any errors.

Reading Exams or questions

- The questions will demand you to seriously read the text passage. Do not be tempted to speed-read or skim.
- Read slowly.
- Re-read complex or important sentences.
- Ask yourself often, "What does this (sentence, paragraph, speech, stanza) mean?"
- Use the KNIGHT reading strategy:

Know: Recall what you already know about the topic.

Notice the title and other features of the text.

Identify the "big ideas."

Gather supporting details.

Highlight and mark important information.

Think about what you've read and some possible answers; make connections.

Math Exams or questions

Testing:

1. Read through the exam
 - a. With reading through the whole exam you can
 - i. know what is expected of you;
 - ii. prioritize items on the test;
 - iii. pace yourself.
2. Carefully read the instructions
 - a. Make sure you are answering the question that is being asked!
Often students know how to solve a problem, but they misread or misinterpret the question itself;
3. Check that you have correctly rewritten the problem
 - a. If you use a scratch piece of paper make sure that you correctly rewrite the problem.
 - b. Don't skip steps.
 - c. Start from the beginning
4. *Clearly* write each step of the solution
 - a. Be neat and don't rush writing numbers down.
 - b. Keep checking your solution as you are working.
 - c. Neatness makes it easier to recheck your work.
5. Double check your math, especially your calculator entries
 - a. Double check your calculator work immediately.
 - b. The chances of hitting a wrong number are high, but the chances of hitting the same wrong number are not.
6. Don't Dilly Dally
 - a. If you get stuck on a problem move on and come back to it later.
 - b. When you are finished, recheck all your work.
7. **There is no guessing penalty on the PSSA, so take an educated guess if you are unsure. You have a 50% chance of getting the right answer.**

Terms/Directives

"Directives" ask you to answer, or present information, in a particular way. Review these, and most of all note that there are different ways of answering a question or writing a paper!

Compare:

Examine qualities, or characteristics, to discover resemblances. "Compare" is usually stated as "compare with": you are to emphasize similarities, although differences may be mentioned.

Contrast:

Stress dissimilarities, differences, or unlikeness of things, qualities, events, or problems.

Criticize:

Express your judgment or correctness or merit. Discuss the limitations and good points or contributions of the plan or work in question.

Define:

Definitions call for concise, clear, authoritative meanings. Details are not required but limitations of the definition should be briefly cited. You must keep in mind the class to which a thing belongs and whatever differentiates the particular object from all others in the class.

Describe:

In a descriptive answer you should recount, characterize, sketch or relate in narrative form.

Diagram:

For a question which specifies a diagram you should present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation in your answer. Generally you are expected to label the diagram and in some cases add a brief explanation or description.

Discuss:

The term discuss, which appears often in essay questions, directs you to examine, analyze carefully, and present considerations pro and con regarding the problems or items involved. This type of question calls for a complete and entailed answer.

Enumerate:

The word enumerate specifies a list or outline form of reply. In such questions you should recount, one by one, in concise form, the points required.

Evaluate:

In an evaluation question you are expected to present a careful appraisal of the problem stressing both advantages and limitations. Evaluation implies authoritative and, to a lesser degree, personal appraisal of both contributions and limitations.

Explain:

In explanatory answers it is imperative that you clarify and interpret the material you present. In such an answer it is best to state the "how or why," reconcile any differences in opinion or experimental results, and, where possible, state causes. The aim is to make plain the conditions which give rise to whatever you are examining.

Illustrate:

A question which asks you to illustrate usually requires you to explain or clarify your answer to the problem by presenting a figure, picture, diagram, or concrete example.

Interpret:

An interpretation question is similar to one requiring explanation. You are expected to translate, exemplify, solve, or comment upon the subject and usually to give your judgment or reaction to the problem.

Justify:

When you are instructed to justify your answer you must prove or show grounds for decisions. In such an answer, evidence should be presented in convincing form.

List:

Listing is similar to enumeration. You are expected in such questions to present an itemized series or tabulation. Such answers should always be given in concise form.

Outline:

An outline answer is organized description. You should give main points and essential supplementary materials, omitting minor details, and present the information in a systematic arrangement or classification.

Prove:

A question which requires proof is one which demands confirmation or verification. In such discussions you should establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence or by logical reasoning.

Relate:

In a question which asks you to show the relationship or to relate, your answer should emphasize connections and associations in descriptive form.

Review:

A review specifies a critical examination. You should analyze and comment briefly in organized sequence upon the major points of the problem.

State:

In questions which direct you to specify, give, state, or present, you are called upon to express the high points in brief, clear narrative form. Details, and usually illustrations or examples, may be omitted.

Summarize:

When you are asked to summarize or present a summarization, you should give in condensed form the main points or facts. All details, illustrations and elaboration are to be omitted.

Trace:

When a question asks you to trace a course of events, you are to give a description of progress, historical sequence, or development from the point of origin. Such narratives may call for probing or for deduction.

Sources

<http://www.studygs.net/tsttak1.htm>